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SUBJECT: UN ENVOY WRESTLES CONCESSIONS FROM MUGABE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Eric T Schultz under Section 1.4
b/d

Summary

11. (C) UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland visited Zimbabwe December 4-7 to survey the ongoing humanitarian crisis and to press the GOZ for better cooperation. In his public remarks Egeland was relatively upbeat, claiming good UN/GOZ cooperation on HIV/AIDS and food assistance. However, he strongly backed the Tibaijuka report and reiterated UN criticism of Operation Murambatsvina. In his private briefing for the diplomatic corps, Egeland said his basic message to the GOZ would be the need for major policy changes that would facilitate donor assistance.

12. (C) UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Assistant Director Agnes Asekenye-Oonyu, who has been in Zimbabwe for the past three months, gave post an inside look at Egeland's meeting with President Mugabe. According to Asekenye-Oonyu, Mugabe had conceded to Egeland that Zimbabwe had humanitarian problems and needed assistance. Egeland had subsequently pressed, and Mugabe had agreed, to make political and humanitarian concessions, including opening a dialogue with Western donors, to pave the way for a visit by UN Secretary General Annan. Egeland will draft his report for Annan and, as Post understands, brief the Security Council on December 19. End Summary.

Egeland Publicly Applauds GOZ Cooperation, Quietly Pushes for More

13. (SBU) In his December 6 press conference, UN humanitarian chief Egeland said he was pleased with his four-day visit to Zimbabwe in which he had briefed local diplomats, toured several UN and NGO operations in Harare and Bulawayo, and met with President Mugabe. Egeland commended the GOZ for its cooperation on HIV/AIDS and food assistance. The envoy publicly declared his meetings with Mugabe and members of his Cabinet a success. Egeland, however, said the GOZ and the UN had disagreed on the merits of Operation Murambatsvina, which he called &the worst possible thing to come at the worst possible time.&8 Egeland reiterated UN support for the Tibaijuka report and said that the government's refusal to accept tents for those who had been displaced by the operation had only exacerbated the situation.

14. (C) In a private meeting with diplomats from the donor countries on December 5, Egeland said his basic message to the GOZ would be the need for major policy changes that would facilitate donor assistance. Egeland acknowledged the difficult environment for assistance efforts, especially for NGOs, which he hoped his visit would help improve. He also decried the &social meltdown& that had occurred in Zimbabwe, which he attributed primarily to HIV/AIDS and drought, though he acknowledged that GOZ policies had also played a role. With one exception (France) the donors responded by noting that the primary cause of Zimbabwe's current crisis were the GOZ's failed policies. Egeland took the point, but pressed donors to give priority to providing assistance, such as shelter for those made homeless by Murambatsvina, rather than quibbling over the type of shelter or how the people had come to be homeless.

A &Frank and Productive& Meeting with Mugabe

15. (C) Egeland said little publicly about his two-and-a-half hour meeting with Mugabe on December 6, noting only that it was &frank and productive& and that the two had made progress on many fronts, including easing humanitarian access. OCHA Assistant Director Agnes Asekenye-Oonyu on December 7 gave Charge an inside look at the high level meeting, which she described as constructive but at times quite contentious. According to Asekenye-Oonyu, instead of the usual lecture on the &causes& of Zimbabwe's

humanitarian crisis (e.g. illegal western sanctions and drought), she said Mugabe listened to the UN envoy's assessment of the situation and its causes. Mugabe then conceded that his government had made mistakes that had led to the crisis and that the country needed assistance.

16. (C) Asekenye-Oonyu said Egeland had told Mugabe that Annan's proposed trip, which she said was now planned for March, was dependent on Zimbabwe making an attitude change and reengaging with Western donors, especially the US and UK. Mugabe said he was open to such a dialogue and would tone down the rhetoric and follow up with the Norwegian Ambassador in Harare regarding the parameters for possible talks. (N.B. The reference to the Norwegian Ambassador, who arrived in Zimbabwe only in September, is a surprise. Thomas Dahl, the Norwegian Embassy first secretary, on December 6 told poloff that the jet-lagged Egeland and his Ambassador had had a private dinner the night before, which chiefly centered on reminiscing about Egeland's time as deputy minister of foreign affairs in Oslo and had addressed little of substance.)

17. (C) According to Asekenye-Oonyu, Egeland had also pressed Mugabe to improve the operating environment for humanitarian NGOs. Mugabe highlighted the MOU his government had signed with WFP in late November as evidence that he was willing to engage donors on food assistance. Egeland, however, noted that the GOZ's classification of food production figures as a state secret hindered the humanitarian response. Mugabe replied that this was nonsense and said he would speak to Minister of Agriculture Made about releasing the statistics.

18. (C) Asekenye-Oonyu said Egeland had also argued that aid groups faced a labyrinth of government approval that often delayed assistance for months and suggested that the government, along with UN and NGO representatives, form a one-stop-shop. Although he accused NGOs of politicizing aid delivery, Mugabe accepted this proposal, saying he was unaware of the complicated approval process. Mugabe told Egeland to call him personally if this initiative became stalled. Asekenye-Oonyu said Egeland had subsequently asked UN Resident Representative Agostinho Zacarias for weekly updates on the GOZ's progress. She noted that in prior meetings with Egeland, Minister of Public Service Nicolas Goche and Minister of Health David Parirenyatwa had also accepted this proposal but that Egeland's suggestion had prompted a violent reaction from Minister of Local Government Ignatius Chombo, who had threatened to block the meeting with Mugabe.

19. (C) Asekenye-Oonyu said the provision of shelter for the estimated 700,000 people left homeless by Operation Murambatsvina had been the most contentious issue. It had prompted a 20-minute shouting match between Mugabe and Egeland. Mugabe attacked UN Special Envoy Anna Tibaijuka and her report. In return, Egeland pushed back, noting that he, the entire UN system, and Annan personally stood behind the report. Urban renewal projects were okay, said Egeland, but only after new housing was already provided. The UN envoy said he had visited victims of Murambatsvina and called their living conditions unacceptable. Mugabe nonetheless defended his government's rejection of tents to temporarily shelter those displaced, and said tents are for Arabs.⁸

10. (C) Asekenye-Oonyu said that despite his outburst, Mugabe made two key concessions on shelter for Murambatsvina's victims. Mugabe promised to provide proper title to resettled victims, after Egeland noted that documents issued to date would not stand up in court, and Mugabe said the shelters would be allocated based on need. (N.B. Up to now, the GOZ has allocated new homes based on political, not humanitarian, considerations.) The Charge asked how the UN would be able to ensure that this was the case. Asekenye-Oonyu responded that the proposed UN shelter program would be separate from the government's Operation Garikai housing program and that a committee, which would include donors, would allocate the shelters. She added that if the GOZ rejected this method of allocation the shelters would not be built.

The UN's Next Steps

11. (C) Asekenye-Oonyu told Charge that Egeland would write a report on his visit for the Secretary General and that he would likely address the UNSC at some point. (N.B. We understand it will be December 19.) She said Annan was planning to send Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari to Zimbabwe in January to assess first hand the GOZ's progress in fulfilling the commitments made to Egeland. If there were not sufficient progress, Annan's visit could be delayed or cancelled. She added that Gambari was seen by the GOZ as too close to the U.S.

12. (C) Meanwhile, the UN presence in Zimbabwe will get a

boost on New Year,s day when the OCHA field office here becomes permanent. Asekenye-Oonyu said six international members and 21 locals would staff the office but that a director had yet to be named. She herself was due to depart Harare December 8 to return to her job in New York. She said, however, that she might be amenable to staying on in Zimbabwe. A widely respected figure despite her brief tenure here, she said that even the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had lobbied Egeland to offer her an extension.

Comment

13. (C) The GOZ,s actions over the next few months will determine the course of UN and donor engagement with Zimbabwe. If Mugabe and the GOZ fail to honor their commitments to Egeland it will put not only Annan,s visit at risk but will also further complicate the efforts of the U.S. and other donors to provide assistance to Zimbabwe,s suffering people. It may also, however, be the final straw that will rally international and perhaps even African criticism of the regime.
SCHULTZ